Autumn 1960

outposts

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EDWARD LUCIE-SMITH

The Fault

FRESCOES that crumble, marbles bullet-scarred,
And Signorelli's *Pan* burnt in Berlin—
Meaning betrayed by matter, smudged and blurred,
Or altogether lost through shapes it took.
And yet it's hard to blame the paint or stone;
Even words crumble, buried in a book;
Rochester's puns seem almost innocent,
And schoolboys puzzle out what Chaucer meant.

"Blame Time," we say, though through it we exist;
To live's to alter, be from day to day,
From month to month, from one year to the next,
A part of motion. Pictures, statues, words
Are part of us, and therefore will decay;
Bronzes will melt, pots smash themselves to sherds,
Musicians lose the knack of mind and ear
Which finds in certain noises something clear.

Goodbye, then, you who're gone or almost gone—
Zeuxis (no birds are tempted by your fruit),
Sappho (grammarians' rags), even you with one
Smiling statue to show, Praxiteles;
Nameless musicians left without a note
Who blindly finger harps upon a frieze
Swaying from the wall in an Egyptian tomb—
To fill each place you leave, let others come.

And farewell this, which lives for days or weeks,
For ten years or a thousand—let it go.
As the ink dries, the work already seeks
Its own oblivion, starts at once to change
From what I meant to say, or be, or do;
Already, as I look, the poem's strange,
No longer fluid, molten. See it lie
Apart—a cold moon, barren entity.

R. F. WILLETTS

Strangers

IN the valleys of these mountains stalk
Shades of malice, shreds of talk.
We cannot recognise the rock,
Explaining how it seems to mock
The firm-knit clatter of our walk.

The grass is never wholly green,
The broad stream's eddies barely seen;
A distant temple on the height,
Above the mist takes leave of night,
Just where an ambush might have been.

The murmurs of our whispers rend
The silence at the track's feared end,
At the sudden margin of a lake
Whose slime the sun does not forsake,
And on whose spite our thirsts depend.

The sky taunts with its faded blue,
Or spreads its peacock's eyes anew.
And looking for an omen there
Our puzzle spells out in its stare,
We find our limits in its view.

Distracted senses overtired,
Are lulled with scenes the past has fired,
Of how the Bilston furnace shows
On metal writhing under blows
The pelting hammer's beat conspired.

The cornflower bold among the slag,
Sole colour where the spirits sag
Along the gutted, cancered mile
From Cradley Heath to Shenstone's stile,
A glance of light on Mammon's flag.

Of how we walked the turnpike road
On Sundays, when the hawthorn glowed,
Where, teasing fresh the terrier's scent,
The wind from Bristol blows on Clent,
Ruffling cow and sheep and toad.

The inward feeding mind is torn
To present focus, by a thin, forlorn
Pagoda; its once ripe breast
Now drained by time, its lines a jest,
A battered trumpet shrilling scorn.

Time still affirms and contradicts,
Bares all illusions it depicts.
We forge our wishes and our will,
Collective purposes fulfil.
Time leaves, man grows on, derelicts.

MARGARET STANLEY-WRENCH

An Adventure

ONE day, when the sun, stooping as a lover, crushes
The grasses with bruising heat, and the sharp gashes
Of poppies' blood wound the green wayside leaves,
Two more will come, hearts beating, and their lives
Rearing to this stripped moment of desire.

Then, lying in this place, he, stooping over her
Will suddenly feel an ebb, a chill, a bar
Of agony between. She, with her eyes
Receiving his sharp image, and the skies'
Blue naked skin, taut as her own desire

Will see our masks of fear blot out his face,
Dread of completion. Shrinking from love, from peace
We drew back on the margin of attaining.
Haunting this place of knowledge, and of failing
Our ghosts delay, frozen by their own desire.

DANNIE ABSE

After a Departure

INTIMATE god of stations,
on long, faded afternoons
before impatient trains depart,
where the aching lovers wait
and mothers embarrass sons,
discover your natural art:
delicately articulate
an elegy of the heart
for horizons appropriate,
or dialogues for the stage
and the opening of an eye.

Love invents the sadness of
tolerable departures.
So bless every fumbling kiss
when eyes, hands, lips, betray
shy, tentative disclosures,
conclusions that non-lovers miss.
Taxis, buses, surge away
through the grey metropolis
while mortals frown for words to say
and their ordinary messages
approximate, therefore lie.

Those heroes who departed
spouting famous monologues
were more verbose than we.
Anthony at Paddington,
bizarre in his Roman togs,
a sword clanking on his knee,
would have jabbered on and on
love epithets most happily
well after the train had gone.
Let prosy travellers rage
long as Cleopatras sigh.

Romeo's peroration
for Juliet at Waterloo,
as gulps of steam arise
from the engine on its bit,
and from Station Masters too,
would bring tears to the eyes.
Sooty god of stations permit
your express to dally, revise
timetables, dull schedules if it
allows one more classic page
or a Juliet to cry.

Today, I, your professional
pleb of words who must appear
spontaneous, who knows form
to be decorative logic,
whose style is in the error,
ask forgiveness for my storm
of silence when all speech grew sick;
who, waving from the platform,
found even gesture ironic,
afraid of your beautiful coinage
'I love you' and 'Goodbye'.

BERNARD SMITH

Refugees

SPILT from the niggard rock
mingled with dust
the poor are poorer yet
this Spring that must

break the stone eyelid
soften the fossil ear
cry the world's grief
in a single tear.

IAN FINLAY

Stream Tide

PILED at the point of Scockness, the stream tide
Is flooding, and its waters like a lash
Curl on the sea's backbone. Here, still undrowned,
I lie, and dream of lobsters and of fish
That swim above my head, and in my head
Lolling on that low mattress. What I wish
Is darker than the waters—to be dead
To all but what now drives them to my bed.

The hail comes down with a white bitter sound
And stitches in my head, a sewing-machine
Up down, up down, up down, but with no thread.
And I have lost the thread, and I would drown
The headlands darkening in the frozen rain,
The sea and all its lobsters, black or red.
I wish that I might never rise, become
The sea that still stops short of my low bed.

And tide and tide and tide, and Time, recede
Behind the scraggy fingers of a bush.
Between two bitter showers there is a hush
And down the ebb now I go sailing boats
With holds as dark as coffins. Oil is lush
As rainbows in the bilge. A carcase floats
Barnacled with gulls—mine, or the guts
Of some dead shark: we share the ocean's bed.

A dream, a dream, a dream. For in my head
Time lies as stark as now the Lopness shore
Below the old boat's bones, and it forgets
My life before this island, and before
The meaning of this island. All my dead
But not my drowned, are with me. From my side
The water ebbs, and ebbs. And on the tide
Go floating unclutched straws swept from my bed.

Orkney.

JEAN KENWARD

The Sculptor

STRANGE how this knot of stone
Suddenly chafed and sore
Breaks into life where none
Was known before!

Does it enclose the spawn
Of a god, sublime and fair?
What is the wonder borne
In silence there?

Only the man whose might
Severs the outer skin
Has power to free the sprite
Entombed within;

Only his art can breed
Patiently hour by hour
Out of the stone, a seed:
From rock, a flower.

LAURENCE CLARK

Prognostic Chart

BITS of Shakespeare still about the place,
For graves are mostly dug by hand
And men with wooden hammers mend the road
Before my house this morning. Grandchildren
Will say of us, perhaps,
"The poets of that age
Still had a soil, though thin,
In which to spread their roots."

DENIS GRIFFITHS

Rozel

THE granite jetty was stacked with gear:
Neatly coiled ropes and lobsterpots,
And nets hanging to dry. The blue
Clad fishermen loosened the knots

Mooring their trim sea-smiling brides,
And pampered them with thick brown hands
Gentle and skilled in all the ways
Each maid beloved understands.

At last they left the jetty's end,
Confettied with gulls, and watched by red
And razor-jealous rocks, and on,
On to the sea's great marriage bed.

TIMOTHY CLARK

The First Fragment

COMES a strange struggle from within the egg,
From the white heart the new brown body
Of the thing, wet with its own companion
In the womb. Its bones are still but structures
For the black spreading veins of blood, still seen,
So newly, cruelly cut off from another.
Glistening and blind, the thin transparent beast
Lies listening for the heart-beat of its mother
That was so near, and now is soft beneath
The breasts on which its white lips close and feast.

Hardly awake, its knowledge comes, it sees
The new clouds whipped in an egg-white breeze
And in the west the sun's red yolk is broken.

PETER PORTER

Tobias and the Angel

WHEN I play the sad music my conscience urges
I hear through the great summary of our loss
My Father praising the long cataract before his eyes,
Where on the retina he starves for light.
We are an unlucky family and we have faith
For which we praise our oppressors and our God.

This has been a long journey; my dog is tired,
My companion is a holy dandy, his clothes are praise.
The fish leap from the river, short verbs hold time
For me in a haul—I have an inventory of praise
And do not tire of the simple entering in,
Like my Father keeping a Day Book of his trade.

There is no justice: love relies on luxury,
Faith on habit, health on chemistry,
But praise sits with persistence. Today
There is a sun pestering the water, tomorrow
A water falling from the sun and always
The pilgrim cursing the falling water and performing sun.

I shall get home one day or if I die instead
An Insurance Angel will tell my waiting wife
His grave is furnished by his good upbringing,
His habits were proper, his doubt all to the good;
From such warm orthodoxy melancholy shrinks,
He did what he was told, obedient and sane.

So when the miracle strikes from the open door,
The scales fall from my Father's eyes and light goes in,
I shall be eating a traveller's heavy meal
Made much of by the kitchen staff. Our house
Is not a tabernacle, miracles are forgotten
In usefulness, the weight and irony of love.

MATTHEW SIMPSON

The Sudden Self

HE did not wish to mourn so outwardly
The loss that shattered mediocrity and forced
Revaluation: he would rather have let
The rain fall outside, eased his weight
In soft armchaired contentment, settled in,
Than find himself through sudden pain.

His comfort could not come on trays;
Needle, swab and steady, alien hand
Could mend no heart-break here.

Sick to death of ubiquitous eyes
Veneered with the polish of small gods;
Sick of friends who held debate
Behind locked doors of jury-rooms;
But, above all, sick of the sudden self
Playing cathartic tragedies
On the mind's flat, silent screen,
He ran to a valley, ferned and fresh,
And sat beneath a tree in buddha-pose
Watching gnats spiralling, and fish
Flip sudden ripples on a stream.

Here, his self stood naked, primed
For the miracle that, willed-for, comes
Like the opposite bank to a leap:
He jumped.
His grief became a pale
Nostalgia, scar instead of wound.

PHILIP HOBSBAUM

The Lesson of the Master

WHAT was it? But to concentrate was hard.
Amidst the whirl of words the rattling brain
Packed in, gave up. And, sitting at your feet,
In the Fellows' Garden, dazzled by the sun,
("Wadham will tell us who's a Philistine"),
We laughed at your jokes like children at a treat.

But were they jokes? In front of my office desk
Often your brown baked features would erupt.
I answered letters as punctually as I could,
Carefully annotated every script—
"Your job? Yes, relatively uncorrupt,
But when you've said that—well, what have you said?"

Through schools, through universities, that voice,
Nasal and creaking, questioned what I did.
Research, the "higher navvying", was slow,
Teaching on my own I was just as dead.
Whatever I did, my moral choice was "placed",
But now I know how much I did not know.

I know a world in which self self betrays
In cause of self, a world by machines bent
Into vicarious life, informed with lies,
By paper wasted, sold. That's what you meant—
We should be contented only with discontent,
And rest only in ceaseless restlessness.

(For F. R. Leavis on his 65th birthday)

ERIC RATCLIFFE

The Ladies of the Night

THEY wait on the platform in the gospel light,
having been amused in one way or another,
carefully assorted, the ladies of the night.

Time only serves to twist their faces tight:
tripartite, rigid, mistress, maid or mother,
they wait on the platform in the gospel light.

Tensely when the iron wheels recite
they turn to hear the fervent heavy stanza,
carefully assorted, the ladies of the night.

It seems the train in some way will requite
their patience, as, without a whisper,
they wait on the platform in the gospel light.

Stiletto-heeled and eager for the rite
they step towards the half-expected donor,
carefully assorted, the ladies of the night.

The carriages go by, pass out of sight;
I can't detect the slight appears to matter.
They wait on the platform in the gospel light,
carefully assorted, the ladies of the night.

LESLIE NORRIS

The Beast

NOW that the thunderous eyes
In the hushed cave of air
Slowly materialise
I am full as a well with fear.

Hush, we are not alone.
Darkness has let the beast out.
The fir has dropped its cone
And the candle its light;

Its light that was all I had,
That would quietly hide
The thunderous eyes and mad
Beast at my side.

PHOEBE HESKETH

Flowering Cherry

A WHITEHEART cherry flowers in his brain,
Rootless, deathless, fruitless, there it sways
Judgment, dreams; an opiate from pain
And raw relationships, it blurs and greys
Each strident-coloured conflict. See him go
Jostling to the office, elbowed-out
From progress, opportunity; a snow
Of petals clouds regret, and pads the shout
Of accusation with a soundless drift.
Insulated by that vision, he
Moves heedless of his fellows, making shift
Of claims, demands; defendant cherry-tree
Absolves from debts of money, duty, love.
Mankind resents the rope, but he unbound
From grudge and drudgery is free to rove
The kingdom of his mind, feet off the ground.
The cord is cut that binds him to the grave—
He who skipped the womb to grow in space.
No knotted conscience scourges him, no wave
Can rear its fearful threat in that no-place
Where the rootless cherry flowers behind his face.

CHRISTOPHER HAMPTON

Question of Truth's Absence

THE camera's eye records the image
Exact and dead: this gesture
That was movement frozen out of time:
The glance deceived into perversion
Of its evanescent form.
On the film
An unknown face, like yours
Intact in feature, stares or smiles,
Usurping the instant
And worthless—a congealed
Stiff mask tricked out in white on black,
The smile arranged as though a skilled
Mortician had touched up a corpse.

The similitude of someone you were then,
But not you, then or now. Between you,
Or between two moments of you;
As it were a shadow made secure.

IAIN CRICHTON SMITH

Scholar

IN the hour of pale triangles he is happy.
Sides are not buckled by the senseless storm.
Harsh red diagonals do not break the sleepy
and tidy parallelograms of his calm.

The writhing flesh with Plato beds at last.
An empty sky is cold between the lines.
Appalling honesties of flagrant waste
are here converted to his neater signs.

The mathematics of the head confer
their subtle wreaths on heads that shake with fright.
Actual nightmares of insomniac fire
are purged by patience to a cooler light

less various less violent till he
learns by his measure not the dance but this
control by number of the numerous sea—
a slender rope across the black abyss.

ROBERT GITTINGS

Meridian

HIGH summer has set in.
Long purples flag the marsh.
The pond is dry of all but scum.
Cowparsley rank and harsh
Turrets the hedgerows, where the hum
Of secret wingers makes a singing din.

Fields get their second green.
Heavily lands the crow.
The ringdove mulls from cloudy oak.
The mild processions go,
Linking their hoofbeats, to the stroke
Of milking hands in the dark barn unseen.

The peak-time of the year—
The moment of decline—
Though all around juts harvest-high,
This gesture would be mine:
To slip away before the world can die,
Or what a man must love be dust and fear.

EDGAR FOXALL

Passing By

THE house maintains its secret in the rain
as up the path an alien figure comes
complete with scarf and basket in the shower.

But I forget, sauntering by the gate,
it's thirty years since last I touched the lock.

And far away there chimes another clock
with heavy voice that never knew my hour;
and yet I do not feel the slightest pain
that here, where I was born, whoever homes
shall not remember that I trod her path.

I used to think that here I'd feel the weight
and ache of time. But no—
nothing subtracts from nothing's aftermath.

MARTIN S. DWORKIN

Green Music

IN our salad days, we had a man
come in to play the syrinx while we danced.
But that was long ago; now is a nation
of ungainly moments, citizens and instants,
graceless and equal to goodness, to evil.
The music no longer measures us to greener things,
softer than savagery, yet savage things,
prowling where the cities are.
The music no longer measures us.
We hire a fiddle and some brass
to blow and tinkle at dinner,
behind a golden arras,

while waiters wipe our chins.
Under the lichens, the minerals murmur greener
serenades;
we nod, tasting the last morsels
of the feast, sinking our fingers—
we eat with our hands, but gently, genteely—
into the liver of Prometheus.

U.S.A.

FREDA BOND

Do Not Remember

DO not remember the voice grown tender in greeting,
The plane tree's shadow sifted on the wall;
Forget the thrush in the laurel hedge, repeating
His vesper litany; forget the fleeting
Lustre of sunset, and the steady flame
Of noon by the willow pond: forget them all.

Do not remember; for the eyes directed
Back to the garden and the sword-barred gate
Are blind to the road's white trail, to the
maple burning
On the verge of the sombre grove; are blind,
discerning
Only yesterday's bird-haunted boughs, reflected
In the bright, convex mirror of a tear.

Do not remember, though
Forswearing memory, you forswear
Man's royal heritage, and find
Again the beast's oblivious mind—
A high-walled courtyard, where
Neither tomorrow's snow
Nor yesterday's sirocco troubles to-day,
And the long afternoon dies slowly, gently away.

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J. R. HOWELL

Silhouette

THE ice-clear wings
surprise the sky,
born suddenly in blue,
and the seagull's cry
dazzles the calm
sea-whispering silence.

Sharp by the torn sea-fringe
the flash of white,
transforming silence to
an agony of sound.

Picked bones of gulls
to the sea-doom's truth
bear age-long faith;
the listless wing
to the turn of tide
a silent witness.

But the life of a gull
is a flash and a cry,
and this remains
the moment's lyric feat,
a silhouette,
a mark upon an unencumbered sky.

The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot. By Hugh Kenner (Allen, 30/-).

"The new is an emptier darkness than the old"—Empson.

POINTING out what we are likely to find valuable in this book should not take very long. Some intelligently adverse criticism of the plays; some biographical matter not dug up before; one or two new references for allusions; a relation of some characteristic Eliot attitudes back to F. H. Bradley—this is what, in the way of help, Mr. Kenner has to offer; and it doesn't take us very far.

He never, for example, makes any attempt to answer the questions most often asked by those who have grown up to find the revolutionary young poets of the Twenties embalmed as Elder Statesmen of the Fifties. Is Eliot really a great poet?—a serious question at a time of stock valuations. What are the indisputably major poems, and how do we read them? Why—a question so far ignored by all Eliot commentators—why has Eliot had so little useful influence on younger poets?

This is even more relevant now that the last forty years can be seen to have produced little more than a few good but essentially minor poets; and not any the less relevant if the emphasis is placed on (for example) Empson, Graves and Betjeman rather than Spender, Dylan Thomas, Edith Sitwell and the rest of the fashionables with whom we were plagued in our youth. Even though Auden holds his ground, it is for poems that resemble the lyrical Graves rather than the sibylline Eliot. Mr. Kenner makes no attempt to explain whether Eliot could not help the better poets because (as is now modishly suggested) he was an eccentric side-issue or whether it was because he rediscovered a lost, though once central, tradition of English verse.

This omission associates with a reluctance to discriminate among the poems. Mr. Kenner spends too much time explicating the patently obvious *Prufrock* and, in consequence, scamps the *Four Quartets* and *Ash Wednesday*—the latter is exasperatingly referred to as "a thin minor music of ceremonious intricacy". Yet these, together with *Gerontion,* would surely be the poems one would put forward in claiming Eliot not only as a major poet of our time—as could be said of Yeats, Pound and Stevens—but as the greatest poet since Wordsworth and the author of poetry comparable with that of his greatest predecessors; with the Second Dunciad and the soul's tragedy Donne called his *Holy Sonnets.*

We can understand the reasons for Mr. Kenner's difficulty. Such a discrimination would upset his central thesis of Eliot as a gradually disappearing Possum. The power of East Coker III

depends largely on the deliberate revocation in the bleak and grinding verse of what it appears to assert—a positive way out of a moral impasse. All Mr. Kenner says about this passage is that it invites us, like the third part of *Burnt Norton,* to descend lower (into Gloucester Road tube station, he elsewhere informs us).

Mr. Kenner does observe, however, the extreme formality of the poem's organisation—each of the Quartets deals with a different season, a different element; their structures are formally parallel, etc. He could have gone on from this observation to the obvious corollary; the poem had to be given such external shape because it is devoid of organic progression. Few readers will admit to being unable to remember what each of the Quartets is about or to explain (except in Mr. Kenner's way) how they differ from each other. *Four Quartets* is Eliot's *Prelude* : a spiritual diary, 1934-1942; an exploration of the dark night of the soul. The poem displays no disunity (other than a certain unevenness, most marked in *The Dry Salvages*) because the exploration is into the depths of an inescapable sense of wasted effort and the consequent paralysis of the will. This extreme static quality makes for the ferocious concentration of the verse, which easily carries the few dead passages. The structure, if hard to rationalise, is equally hard to fault. It is as though despair were infinitely extended. The moment is stretched to eternity, as indeed Eliot, with a grave pun, tells us—

> "What might have been and what has been
> Point to one end, which is always present".

In addition to this extension, images (such as that of the tube train) repeat themselves in each Quartet; so that the stasis of the poem is both linear and cyclic.

There is nothing fragmentated in *Four Quartets* as there is about the more tentative *Waste Land.* The questioning of *East Coker*

> "What was to be the value of the long looked forward to,
> Long hoped for calm, the autumnal serenity
> And the wisdom of age?"

anticipates in its disillusion the answer, delivered with solemn authority in *Little Gidding*—

> "Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age
> To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort.
> First, the cold friction of expiring sense
> Without enchantment, offering no promise. . . ."

The poet who had the courage to face the pointlessness of even the most "successful" life, taken on its own, and the integrity to set down what he saw, could develop further only into a prophet or a mystic, unless he chose to give up altogether.

We know what Eliot chose to do. What made his choice inevitable also made for his lack of formative influence on the age whose moral impasse he so remarkably expressed. Eliot incomparably creates a state of not-being; evokes emptiness; communicates the failure of communication. This has been called a rejection of life, and has been compared with that of Swift; but, whereas Swift is surely a neurotic inveighing against a stable society, exacerbated by Harris's Disease as much as by high-minded rancour, Eliot was faced with what at first looked like a world run mad, a breakdown of civilisation, and what later, in *Ash Wednesday*, appeared to be in addition a breakdown of his personal faith. If Eliot's work appears to be the supreme testimony of a failure of life, we ought to ask ourselves what response a sane man can be expected to have to a world which is a blasphemy against the spirit. There have been dark ages before, but men like Eliot were armed with faith to combat them. Thrown upon his own human resources, Eliot can only render their collapse with unanswerable fidelity.

"Desiccation of the world of sense,
Evacuation of the world of fancy,
Inoperancy of the world of spirit."

None of our younger poets, comfortable Men of Letters as they are, feel enough like Eliot to be able to learn from him. The Auden group adapted his vatic utterance to their own Leftish brand of doom, but, at length, grew out of it; and better poets wisely followed their own course.

How much of this, or of Eliot's true distinction, is recognised may be another matter. Eliot is a safe enough classic, of course; his West End comedies and his Anglo-Catholicism are alike appreciated, and the cultivated show their modernity by quoting "realistic" bits from *Prufrock* and the *Waste Land*. Like many great writers, Eliot is known and loved for his second-rate work. The worst one can say of Mr. Kenner's book is that it has done nothing to help us out of this situation.

PHILIP HOBSBAUM.

Christ in London: Patrick Galvin (Linden Press, 12s. 6d.).
Begging the Dialect: Robin Skelton (Oxford University Press, 15s.).
Bone Thoughts: George Starbuck (Yale University Press, 24s.).

THE publishers claim for Mr. Galvin's second volume, *Christ in London,* that it is "strong, demanding and essentially contemporary". Much of the poetry has indeed an irrefragable strength that derives from the raw ballad tradition within which Mr. Galvin works: *The Iron Guards* or *A Summer's Day,* for example. But to strength is added a disruptive violence which one might pardonably think a reaction against the suave and sometimes jejune formalism of some contemporary poets, were not its insistence so clearly pre-occupying as to distract the reader from the poetry to the poet. Time and again we come upon such disturbing hyperboles as: "his mouth was an ocean of blood / On my face", or: "We tore your heart / We set you down / In blood". All this seems strident, pathological, when set next to the superb, anonymous restraint of the greatest ballad literature:

> "And sad and silent was the night
> That was atween thir twae".

Yet Mr. Galvin's fecund exaggeration can incorporate humour, as in the boisterous success of *Remember the Night?* It is, however, the title poem which best guarantees both his poetic vigour and contemporary awareness: in it the poet walks a nightmare round of London by dead of night, evoking alongside the blasphemous violence of our own age London's grim past and grimmer future.

Mr. Skelton's poetry complies with no contemporary movement. Like most radically religious poets, he has an individual voice, though he owes something to other great individualists like Blake and Yeats. In *Begging the Dialect,* as in his two previous volumes, Mr. Skelton startles and delights with his good craftsmanship and kaleidoscopic shuffling of imagery; but, particularly in the first, very varied section of poems, we are too often disappointed of a sense of direction. Both *Apologia* and the title-poem have something quite specific to say and say it with a direct economy that contrasts with a number of other poems which, in probing subtler intuitions, seem often openly to acknowledge their failure in total coherence. Thus, in a poem significantly called *An Uncertain Meaning,* we read: "That's not what I set out to say"; and elsewhere we come rather negatively up against: "No phrase / Will open up the somewhere we would go", or: "Yet how am I to say . . . what can't be said / Except by silence?". Too often there

seems to be a gap between the valid particularity of incidental description and metaphor and a fully realised concept, so that the poems add up to less, not more, than the sum of their parts. This is true even of the second section of the book, an ambitiously-planned ballad-sequence which explores through permutations of complex metaphor the elemental experiences of birth, life, death. Here the jagged rhythms and naked rawness we noted in Mr. Galvin's ballads are subdued in meditation. The images are often traditional: birth is a launching of individual life on all life's teeming ocean; ignorance walls us round in a darkness splintered with the intuitive light of human need:

> "Love is the one apostrophe;
> across the racking cloud
> the word of birth calls loud as light
> to rip your nesting shroud".

It would be ungracious not to allow these ballads much power and beauty and a cunning interweaving of theme, symbol, image; but again Mr. Skelton's surest guarantee as a poet, his richness of metaphor, tends to proliferate and exist for its own sake.

Bone is under all is a re-iterated theme of Mr. Skelton's that by coincidence might be taken as a text for much of Mr. Starbuck's first volume, *Bone Thoughts*. Perhaps both poets have set themselves to meet the challenge of Yeats's assertion:

> "He that sings a lasting song
> Thinks in a marrow bone".

Mr. Starbuck's poetry has the cleanness and sharpness of bone; at its best it is spare and stripped for action, its sensuousness surviving —sometimes precariously—the intelligence and wit:

> "How perfectly the snake smoothes over the fact
> he strings sharp beads around the charmer's neck.
> Bird bone may be breakable, but
> Have you ever held a cat's jaw shut?
> Brittle as ice".

There are some searching observations on city life in the Boston poems, and an odd keen glance at nature, but all Mr. Starbuck's horizons threaten with atomic cloud. His wry satire wipes the smile from your face: "He won a ribbon but lost his chest". *Elegy,* the concluding poem, blends wit with compassion and, one hopes, points the direction of Mr. Starbuck's future development.

RAYMOND WILSON.

The Magic-Maker, E. E. Cummings: Charles Norman (Macmillan, New York, 41s. 6d.).
The Fugitive Group: Louise Cowan (Louisiana State University Press, $5).

ALTHOUGH much has been written about the poetry of E. E. Cummings, there have been few attempts at an objective assessment of his achievement. Most of the commentaries on his work (they can hardly be called serious criticism) fall into one or other of two clearly defined categories: those written by devoted admirers intent upon praising the master and ignoring his limitations, and those by equally prejudiced opponents unable to see beyond the typographical tricks and innovations.

If Mr. Charles Norman has produced an extremely interesting volume on the life and work of Cummings, it cannot be said that he has seized the opportunity to provide a properly balanced account of his poetry. One would not quibble too much on that score (for the volume has other merits) were it not for the fact that Mr. Norman goes out of his way to call attention to it. "I have written this book," he says in his first sentence, "because I believe E. E. Cummings to be one of the truly great creators of our time, in poetry, prose and paint. . . ." This is a considerable claim to make for any creative artist at any time. Mr. Norman is, of course, perfectly entitled to express his personal opinion in this way if he chooses to do so, but in making such an issue of it, he places himself at an immediate disadvantage, for the reader expects, quite reasonably, to find some justification of the claim. No real justification is forthcoming. There is plenty of appreciation and enthusiasm, all of which are enjoyable, but the author does not appear to have adequate critical equipment for a proper evaluation of Cummings's work. Indeed, he is at times unable to distinguish between what is good poetry and what is mere rhetoric.

Nevertheless, he is a reliable guide when he confines his attention to the man rather than to his poetry, and here he succeeds in painting a lifelike picture of the poet who wrote:

> "What if a much of a which of a wind
> gives the truth to summer's lie;
> bloodies with dizzying leaves the sun
> and yanks immortal stars awry?
> Blow king to beggar and queen to seem
> (blow friend to fiend; blow space to time)
> —when skies are hanged and oceans drowned,
> the single secret will still be man."

Mrs. Louise Cowan makes no pretence of criticism, yet her volume will be a necessity to any serious student of American poetry. It is a straightforward, well-written and carefully documented account of the formation and development of the group of American poets who, in the early 'twenties, met regularly at Nashville for the purpose of discussing and criticising each other's work, and who published *The Fugitive* magazine from 1922 to 1925. The Fugitives were a group of sixteen poets which included John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Laura Riding, and that remarkable sonneteer, Merrill Moore, who is reputed to have written over 50,000 sonnets in 20 years or so. As Allen Tate afterwards remarked, "there never was so much talent, knowledge and character accidentally brought together in one American place in our time." It is true that most of the poets concerned published their best work after the magazine had expired and the group broken up, but there can be no doubt that the group experience was of tremendous assistance to them all during their formative period.

BERNARD FOSTER.

Outlines: Vera Rich (Privately Printed).
The Unlooked-for Season: Jenny Joseph (7s. 6d.). } Scorpion
A Family Affair: Edwin Brock (6s.). } Press
To Carve an Effigy: A. E. Lawson (3s.).
All Weathers Chancing: Margaret Curry (3s.). } Outposts
The Talisman: Nicodemus (5s.). } Publications
Lost Dimension: Fred Cogswell (3s.).

WHATEVER criticisms can be raised against the prevailing trends of poetry during the last seven or eight years, it can at least be said that the general effect has been towards tightness of form and precision in the use of language. All this appears to have gone unnoticed or unheeded by Miss Vera Rich. Her collection, *Outlines,* is filled with long straggling lines of the most "melodious" and over-ripe verbiage I have seen for some time, and it is all so vague and ostentatiously "poetic" that it makes little impact upon the mind:

"The petals of the moonbeams flutter sleepily over a heart-aching world. . . ."

"And only a slender music
Dances fawn-footed over the rain-starred branches . . ."

This is to be regretted since Miss Rich undoubtedly has talent if

she will only curb her woolly enthusiasms and prune her diction.

She could, for instance, learn something from Miss Jenny Joseph, who seldom wastes a word in *The Unlooked-for Season.* Yet despite the matter-of-fact tone and the give-away line, Miss Joseph's work has an emotive power which grows on the reader. "Our visions," she says in one of her poems,

> "enter like sunlight into water
> Making no noise, but even they depend
> Upon the weather for their frame of mind."

and it would be equally true to say that she herself relies very largely upon the processes of nature and the seasonal cycle in her poetry—not, however, like the authentic nature poet, as a subject or a background—but in a curious symbolical manner to evoke atmosphere and express states of mind. Examples of her method are to be found in the title-poem, *Somnambulist, Death in Winter, Wet Sunday, Summer Amnesty, February Floods 1953, City Winter* and, at its most effective, in *River Rising in India.*

Mr. Edwin Brock's collection consists of two sonnet sequences *Eros and Agape* and *A Family Affair.* In the first he explores the love relationship from various angles and in the second concerns himself, more successfully, with family relationships in poems to his father, his mother and his wife. These are very honest and intimate poems, so that one feels almost like an eavesdropper—

> "And I am lonely wishing I could give
> more than pity, more than boyhood love."
>
> (*To my Mother*)

> "We walked
> "where we had been before we married; quiet
> it was with my voice droning on; ten years
> I talked away before I carried your mood
> and you to where the grass was long, and tight
> our love became to loose your worries,
> as sweet your song becomes when I intrude."
>
> (*To my Wife*)

—but the unobtrusive craftsmanship is extremely satisfying.

The first poem in *To Carve an Effigy* whets the reader's appetite—"To be free," says Mrs. Lawson, "is . . . To seek and find new links / Between the earthly and the ether." Unfortunately, the author's own search seems to take her no further than

the nearest *Hill-Top,* "where heaven / and earth / so nearly meet." These pieces are pleasant enough in their way, but they are too dependent on easy generalisations and never display much insight. A few autumn leaves, a sunrise or a sunset, are sufficient for Mrs. Lawson's needs at present and apart from *Cataclysm* (which deals with atomic destruction) she confines herself to what immediately catches her eye.

Miss Margaret Curry's descriptions in *All Weathers Chancing* are more realistic, and she is able to express an individual response to what she sees and experiences. Instead of relying upon vague generalisations, she seizes upon the particular, and recreates the scene by the use of her imagination. *After Viewing the Palazzio Vecchio, Florence, The Old Manor House,* and *Cap Ferrat,* for instance, have an authentic atmosphere all their own.

The Talisman and Other Poems contains the long title-poem in seven sections and *Requiem,* a sequence of ten sonnets. Although elaborating upon certain themes and ideas from *The Tempest* and applying them to a lifetime's experience, *The Talisman* stands as a poem in its own right and can be enjoyed without reference to the play. Starting with the question Prospero puts to Miranda—"What in your life remains as its end is reached?"—the author gradually unfolds what might fittingly be called his testament of faith. The sonnets, recording a personal grief, have dignity and are at times moving, despite the over-use of exclamation-marks.

Dr. Fred Cogswell, a Canadian poet, has already published a volume of poems, and his *Lost Dimension* is easily the best of the collections under review. For such a small collection the range is extraordinarily wide and the craftsmanship exhibited suggests that the utmost care has been taken in selection. What comes over most strongly in these poems, whatever the subject, and especially in *Big Cyrus, The Man Who Climbed, Black Widow, Burdens* and *Tame Goose,* is the tension created by the skilful presentation of opposing points of view—a dualism which reminds one of the American poet, John Crowe Ransom, though the poems owe nothing to Ransom in language, style or structure.

WALTER CARROLL.

NOTICES

OUTPOSTS PUBLICATIONS. The latest additions to the *Outposts* Series of booklets are: *Morning in Ankara* by Michael Thorpe, *The Trobriand Islanders* by R. F. Willetts, *Chiaroscuro* by Marjorie Battcock, and *In Time of Need* by Edith Pickthall. For details see list opposite.

P.E.N. MEMBERSHIP. Readers will be interested to hear that Brian Merton Gould has been elected to membership of the P.E.N. on the strength of his collection of poems, *Main Line,* published in the *Outposts* Series.

THE HEADLANDS, poems by Howard Sergeant (published by Putnams) can be ordered through local booksellers or obtained from this address, price 8s. including postage. "Those who despair of the aims and values of modern poetry should ponder Mr. Sergeant and think again."—*Contemporary Review.*

THE DULWICH GROUP. Monthly readings of poetry are held by the Dulwich Group at the Crown and Greyhound, Dulwich Village, London, S.E.21, on the last Wednesday of each month. These meetings are free to the public, though a collection is taken to defray expenses. The Crown and Greyhound is easily reached from North Dulwich Station (London Bridge) and Herne Hill (Victoria). It is close to the No. 37 bus route.

POETRY AWARDS. Readers are reminded that Howard Sergeant is British Commonwealth Editor on the Editorial Board of BORESTONE MOUNTAIN POETRY AWARDS. It is his responsibility to cover all the magazines published throughout the British Commonwealth and to select the best poems for the consideration of the Board as a whole. In order to execute this task as thoroughly as possible, he invites readers to co-operate by drawing his attention to outstanding poems and by informing him of the appearance of any new magazines which publish poetry. There are valuable prizes for the best three poems, and a selection from the remainder are published in the annual anthology sponsored by the organisation (*Best Poems of 19 . . .*).